

CASA Rules and Guidelines

I. Guidelines

A. Authority for the CASA Program: The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program was authorized to operate in Maryland, subject to these Rules and Guidelines, by the adoption, in 1989, of Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article § 3-834.1 of the Annotated Code of Maryland.

B. Roles and Responsibilities of Volunteer and Status in the Court Proceeding: The Annotated Code of Maryland states that role of the Court Appointed Special Advocate is to:

1. Provide the court with background information to aid the court in making decisions in the child's best interest; and
2. Ensure that the child is provided appropriate case planning and services.

The CASA volunteer is considered a Friend of the Court and does not have party status. The volunteer is considered an agent of the court and is appointed at the judge's discretion to represent the child's best interests. Volunteers are not represented by an attorney but should be provided access to legal counsel by the program.

C. Program Operation: Court-Appointed Special Advocate Programs shall be administered by a director who has been selected by the local entities who are sponsoring the Court-Appointed Special Advocate Program and approved by the Administrative Office of the Courts. The minimum requirements for this appointment are:

1. A master's degree in the field of social work, psychology or child welfare-related field of study, or a bachelor's degree and an equivalent number of years of child welfare and/or non-profit management experience.
2. A minimum of 5 years experience in the field of child abuse and neglect.
3. A minimum of 2 years experience in administration or supervision.
4. Demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the juvenile court system and the needs of abused and neglected children.
5. Knowledge of fundraising/development.

All supervisory staff shall have the following minimum qualifications:

1. Bachelor's degree in the field of social work, psychology or other clinically-oriented discipline.
2. A minimum of 2 years experience in the field of child abuse and neglect.
3. A minimum of 1 year experience in supervision of volunteers/staff is preferred.
4. Demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the juvenile court system and the needs of abused and neglected children.

D. Program Structure: The program director shall establish and maintain a structure designed to facilitate the recruitment, screening, training, and supervision of CASA volunteers by:

1. Developing and implementing an annual volunteer recruitment plan, including such strategies as meeting with relevant organizations for the purpose of recruiting their membership for volunteers and soliciting the print, radio and TV media to aid in this recruitment. Special efforts shall be made to recruit individuals who reflect the characteristics of the community of which they will be serving minimally, and, optimally, reflect the diversity of the children served.
2. Developing and implementing an application and screening process whereby applicants will be appropriately selected to participate in a pre-service training program.
3. Designing and conducting a pre-service training program that will educate the applicants about the following:
 - a. History of CASA;
 - b. Roles and Responsibilities of a CASA and program procedures; and the role of all the relevant agencies and professionals in the child welfare and juvenile court systems;
 - c. Cultural Awareness;
 - d. Dynamics and Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect;
 - e. Child Development and Permanency Planning;
 - f. Laws Affecting Children;
 - g. Communication and Information Gathering;
 - h. Juvenile Court System;
 - i. Advocacy Skills;
 - j. Court Report Writing;
 - k. Confidentiality requirements.
4. Establishing a procedure with the local Department of Social Services for screening CASA applicants for past allegations of child abuse and/or neglect.
5. Designing and implementing a supervisory process whereby CASAs will receive frequent and complete feedback of their CASA activities by:
 - a. Permitting no more than a 30 to 1 ratio of active CASA volunteers to supervisor. (Note: It is recognized that during the initial developmental stages of CASA programs, due to a temporary shortage in funding, this ratio may not always be met by a CASA program.)
 - b. Establishing and implementing a regular in-service training schedule designed to increase the CASAs' understanding of the dynamics of the population they are serving and consequently enhance their service provision.
6. Establishing either an Advisory Board and/or Board of Directors for the purpose of overseeing the operation of the program and/or providing technical assistance. The membership of an advisory board should include representation from agencies affected by this program but should be made up, primarily, of representatives of the corporate community and the private sector. Boards of directors must have the above representation.

E. Requirements for Volunteer Screening and Selection: The program director shall ensure that applicants meet minimal qualifications prior to certification as a CASA. A CASA must:

1. Be twenty-one years of age or older;
2. Complete an application;
3. Successfully complete the required 30-40 hours of CASA pre-service training;
4. Successfully complete a pre-training screening interview and post-training interview/assessment by the CASA staff;
5. Observe a juvenile court hearing(s);
6. Provide three positive character references;
7. Pass a criminal background check and be found to have not been convicted of or currently charged for the commission or attempt to commit: Murder; Child Abuse; Rape; Child Pornography; Child Abduction; Kidnapping of a Child; or a Sexual Offense as defined under Article 27, subsection 464, 464A, 464B, and 464C of the Annotated Code of Maryland, or any other charge that poses a threat to the safety and/or well-being of a child, indicates poor judgment and/or threatens the credibility of the program;
8. Pass a child abuse registry clearance conducted by the local Department of Social Services (if available);
9. Pass a driving record check conducted by the Motor Vehicle Administration, indicating no more than two points. Prospective volunteers who choose not to transport must still comply with the MVA check. Anyone whose driving record exceeds the above limit may be accepted with the provision that they not transport, however careful consideration must be given to the type, frequency and circumstances of the violations;
10. Provide car insurance information regarding the amount and type of coverage or sign a waiver stating he/she will not transport the child. Programs shall make volunteers aware of the liability issues involved in transporting children;
11. Commit to a minimum of one year service to the program;
12. Sign an oath of confidentiality;
13. Not be employed in a position and/or otherwise involved with an agency that might result in a conflict of interest on the part of the CASA volunteer;
14. Volunteers shall be officially appointed as a CASA via swearing in and/or specific order of the court.

F. Transfers Within the State: CASA volunteers moving to another county or city within the state that has a CASA program shall be subject to the same screening process conducted for other applicants before being allowed to serve as a CASA volunteer in that county or city. The volunteer may be required to attend any or all units of the pre-service training, as determined by the program to which the applicant has applied before being allowed to serve as a CASA.

- G. Authority for Appointment of Court-Appointed Special Advocate and Case Assignment Process:** The CASA Program is authorized by an official Order of the Court, at the judge's discretion, to assign a volunteer to a child's case. Volunteers should be assigned at the earliest stages of the court proceedings and shall remain involved in their assigned cases until dismissal by official Order of the Court. Volunteers who terminate from their assigned cases prior to the conclusion of the court proceedings shall be replaced by the CASA program with other volunteers as soon as possible. A volunteer shall remain appointed to the case until the child is placed in a safe, permanent home or the appointment order is rescinded by the judge or the case is otherwise closed by the court.

Upon reviewing a case assignment, the Court-Appointed Special Advocate shall:

1. Review the Court Order and the case history;
2. Review the Juvenile Court File;
3. Meet with the CASA staff to develop the CASA Case Plan;
4. Schedule and attend appointments with relevant parties;
5. Complete required CASA forms and documentation;
6. Maintain the confidentiality of any and all information received on behalf of the child.

- H. Court-Appointed Special Advocate Records and Supervision:** Upon beginning a case assignment, the Court-Appointed Special Advocate shall:

1. Maintain and submit at least monthly a CASA Contact Log, indicating the date, amount of time spent, and type of all CASA contacts.
2. Maintain and submit monthly a record of travel expenses incurred on the Expense Reimbursement form provided if program provides reimbursement and the CASA desires reimbursement of said expenses.
3. Provide to the Director or staff supervisor a court report, using the Court Report Format, for the assigned case to ensure timely submission to court and parties, according to court procedure.
4. Attend quarterly, individual, face-to-face supervisory meetings, as scheduled by the CASA staff.
5. Complete a minimum of 12 hours of in-service training each year.

- I. Volunteer Dismissal from Programs:** The program director may dismiss a volunteer from the program when the volunteer:

1. Takes action without program or court approval which:
 - a. Endangers the child;
 - b. Is outside the role or powers of the CASA;
 - c. Violates a program policy, court rule, or law, or;
 - d. Contravenes program or court direction.
2. Fails to adequately perform a responsibility as a CASA.

- a. Fails to maintain regular contact with the program office regarding CASA activities as defined by the individual program, and
 - b. Fails to maintain regular contact with the assigned child and/or family as defined by the individual program.
 - 3. Falsifies volunteer application, misrepresents facts during screening process, or commits an act which results in a substantial alteration of his/her qualifications as a CASA.
- J. Communications Between Court-Appointed Special Advocate and the Child:** Communications between a child and a CASA are not privileged. A CASA shall not assure the confidentiality of such communications. Incidents of abuse or neglect disclosed by a child or otherwise discovered by a CASA in addition to the original allegation or after a finding has been reached and treatment services begun, shall be immediately reported to the local Department of Social Services and the program staff.
- K. Liability:** Volunteers have limited protection from liability while carrying out their responsibilities according to the CASA role, per Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article §3-834.1. Programs must carry all appropriate forms of liability insurance for the protection of volunteers, staff, board members and the organization.
- L. Relationship with other CASA Programs, Maryland CASA Association and National CASA Association:** An organization may not operate a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) program in the State of Maryland without being approved by the Administrative Office of the Courts. CASA programs must belong to and actively participate in Maryland CASA Association, a statewide network of CASA programs, and are eligible for technical assistance and other benefits of membership. CASA programs must also be recognized by the National CASA Association as a CASA program. CASA programs must abide by any established Maryland and National CASA Association protocols regarding the recruitment of prospective volunteers and fund raising to prevent impeding other programs' efforts and those of the state and national organizations. CASA programs are not authorized to conduct home studies or evaluations of any kind at the request of other jurisdictions within or outside the state.

II. Rules Pertaining to Funding

Any program interested in obtaining funding through the Administrative Office of the Courts in the upcoming fiscal year must file a completed grant application (original and one copy) in the Administrative Office of the Courts by the close of business on _____. Application forms may be obtained from the Administrative Office of the Courts.

Eligibility for Funding: A CASA Program seeking AOC funding must:

- 1. Be a member in good standing of the National CASA Association and in compliance with NCASAA standards;
- 2. Be a member in good standing of the Maryland CASA Association and in compliance with Maryland CASA standards;
- 3. Be in compliance with all CASA Rules & Guidelines contained in this document;
- 4. Demonstrate the ability (i.e. experience and expertise) to provide the service; (**NOTICE:** Qualifications of *all new* Program Directors must be submitted to the Administrative Office of the Courts prior to budget approval and release of funds) and
- 5. Demonstrate adequate internal financial controls to properly administer grant funds.

Information on the following must be submitted with each grant application:

A. Budget:

1. Operating budgets approved for current fiscal year and proposed for the upcoming fiscal year must be attached. Identify sources of income by personnel and all operating costs.
2. Project costs requested through the Administrative Office of the Courts must be itemized. All personnel and operating costs along with an explanation of why these costs are necessary for the CASA program in the next fiscal year must be detailed. Requests for increased funding over previous year must be justified by program expansion (i.e. serving an increased number of children) or increased cost of providing the service (e.g. increased cost of fingerprinting volunteers).
3. A specific plan for how the program will raise the funds to meet the proposed match from AOC (i.e. if the program plans a series of events, include a timeline and projected revenue; if the program anticipates grants from foundations, include a timeline and identified foundations to be solicited, etc.)

B. CASA Program Organization:

1. Program staff must be identified as well as functions within the organization. Enclose copies of resumes.
2. The functions of the Advisory Board and/or the Board of Directors must be described with respect to program staff and a list of current board members and their occupations/professional affiliations as well as a job description for board members. The grant application must be signed by the President of the Board of Directors for the program.

C. Letter of Endorsement: A letter of endorsement must be provided each year from the Juvenile Court Judge who will be utilizing the Court-Appointed Special Advocate Program in the local jurisdiction.

D. Program Information: Provide information on the following:

1. The application and screening process whereby volunteers will be selected into the program;
 - a. The criteria used in selecting volunteers;
 - b. The criminal background review process conducted by the CASA program and any other record clearance procedure;
2. The number of hours and type of training (pre-service and in-service) provided yearly;
3. Case assignment procedures;
4. Time records kept by program staff and volunteers;
5. Travel records (if applicable) maintained by program staff and volunteers; and
6. The volunteer termination procedure.

E. Program Responsibilities: Describe the responsibilities of the Court-Appointed Special Advocate and how children and families are assisted (attach a copy of the CASA job description).

F. Project Goals and Timeline: Identify the goals to be achieved during the grant year and provide a timeline of grant activities. Goals must be qualitative as well as quantitative (i.e. the outcomes to be achieved with the children served and the number of children to be served).

G. Reporting Requirements:

1. Program Information: Programs must use the *CASA Outcomes Measurement and Evaluation Tool (COMET)* for data collection purposes. Programs will be required to report on the progress toward specific project goals on a bi-annual basis, as well as provide the following statistical information, on a quarterly and annual basis:

On the 15th of the month following the end of each quarter (October, January, April, July), the program is required to provide a statistical report on the accomplishments of the program. Statistical information shall include, minimally:

- a. The number of court-ordered children in need of assistance (CINA) referred to the program during the quarter/year;
- b. The total number of CINAs served by the program during the quarter/year;
- c. The number of CINAs whose cases with the CASA program closed during the quarter/year, the reasons for their closures, the length of time served by the program, etc.;
- d. The number of new volunteers trained during the quarter/year;
- e. The number of volunteers who have actively served (i.e. been assigned to a case) during the quarter/year;
- f. The number of inquiries from prospective volunteers and the sources of those referrals to the program during the quarter/year; and
- g. The number of hours provided yearly by volunteers (annually only).

The narrative report shall be submitted by January 15 and July 15 and shall include program highlights, obstacles encountered in meeting project goals, upcoming events and activities, and any changes in the proposed project plan.

2. Financial Information: Programs must file a quarterly financial report on a form provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts, as well as proof of matching funds within 15 days of the end of each quarter or no further funds will be disbursed.

H. Fiscal Policies and Procedures: Programs are required to establish and maintain financial accounting systems and records to accurately account for funds. Minimally, they should conform to the National CASA Minimum Recommended Internal Financial Control Procedures. Programs are required to have an independent audit conducted annually. Grant funds are subject to any additional terms and conditions issued by the Administrative Office of the Courts upon award of grants, and may be terminated if any terms or conditions are violated, or if adequate progress toward project goals is not demonstrated.

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